

## PREHISTORIC PEOPLE

**PREHISTORIC PEOPLE.** The first human beings probably lived about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  million years ago. But people did not begin to record history until they had invented writing—only about 5,000 years ago. The period before human beings began to write is called *prehistory*.

Prehistoric human beings took the first steps in building civilization. The earliest people were all hunters. In time, many hunters learned to plant crops and raise animals for food, and they became farmers. Prehistoric people invented simple tools, and they discovered how to make fire. They painted the first pictures and shaped the earliest pottery. And they built the first cities.

Because early people kept no written records, scientists search for bones, tools, and other prehistoric remains. They study these objects to learn what early people looked like, how they lived, and how they developed into modern human beings. Most of the tools that have been found and studied are made of stone. As a result, the entire period during which early people lived has been called the Stone Age.

Scientists who study prehistoric human beings believe they developed from humanlike apes that first lived more than 5 million years ago. These apes stood 4 to 5 feet (120 to 150 centimeters) tall and walked erect. Scientists believe these creatures developed into the

earliest form of human being. Then, during hundreds of thousands of years, other forms of human beings developed. These early people looked more and more like modern people. By about 90,000 B.C., prehistoric people looked much like people of today.

Scientists did not begin to realize that people had long prehistoric past until the 1800's. Prehistoric fossils were discovered in 1856 near Düsseldorf, Germany. Scientists could not decide if these fossils came from abnormal modern individual or from an early form of human being.

In 1879, a 12-year-old girl made the first discovery of prehistoric art. While exploring a cave in Spain with her father, she found pictures of large, bull-like animals painted on the cave's ceiling. These paintings—like the fossils discovered earlier—caused disagreement. Scientists could not agree on their age. Soon, many more paintings were discovered in caves in Europe. Scientists dug under the cave floors and found stone tools and bones of the animals shown in the paintings. In caves, human bones lay among the animal fossils. About 1900, most experts agreed such evidence proved that people had lived during prehistoric times.

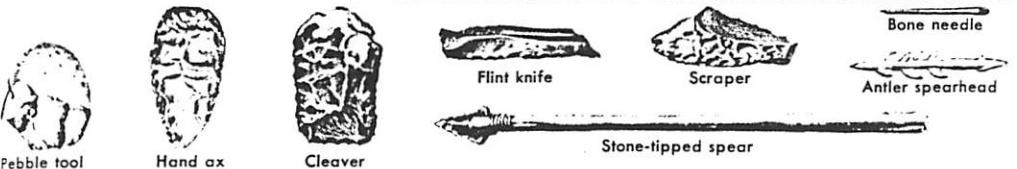
Since 1900, scientists have discovered many remains that have helped them piece together much of the story of early people. But many questions remain.

### The World of Prehistoric People

Prehistoric people lived in a world much different from today's. They first appeared about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  million



WORLD BOOK illustration by Alton S. Tobey; tools below by Alton S. Tobey and James Teason



**Old Stone Age People**, also known as *Paleolithic* people, included all human beings who lived before about 8000 B.C. All Paleolithic people lived by hunting. The Neanderthal people, above, are examples of Paleolithic people. They lived in parts of Africa, Asia, and Europe from about 100,000 to 30,000 years ago. The squatting man twirls a stick to start a fire. One woman scrapes a skin, while the other makes a spear shaft. Some tools used by Paleolithic people are shown above.

ago, at a time when the earth had grown cold. Glaciers covered high mountains throughout the world, and ice blanketed all of Antarctica. Only Africa, southeastern Asia, and most of Central and South America remained warm. The first human beings appeared in Africa during this period. See **ICE AGE**.

By about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  million years ago, the climate had become so cold in Canada and Scandinavia that more snow fell in winter than could melt in summer. As a result, huge sheets of ice formed in these regions and gradually spread southward. Ice sheets more than 1 mile (1.6 kilometers) thick covered much of Europe, western Asia, and North America by about 800,000 B.C. Between that time and about 8000 B.C., the huge ice sheets retreated and advanced again several times.

The ice sheets grew and spread southward during periods called *glacials*. Each of these periods lasted about 10,000 to 60,000 years. Near the end of each glacial, the earth became warmer, and the southern parts of the ice sheets melted. These warmer periods—called *interglacials*—lasted about 20,000 to 60,000 years.

During the glacial and interglacial periods, early people settled almost all of Africa, southern Asia, and southern Europe, and also part of Australia. Some prehistoric hunters even moved into northern Asia and traveled from Siberia to Alaska. But most prehistoric peoples lived in regions with a warm climate. They settled mainly on grassy plains, close to trees, and near water.

Early people did not know how to keep warm in the cold climate near the ice sheets. They learned how to make fire by about 500,000 B.C. But even after people could make fire, they did not have clothing that would keep them warm in a cold climate. If people at that time wore any clothing, it consisted only of loose, unfitted animal furs and skins, or perhaps some plant materials. As a result, they could not live in much of Asia, Europe, and North America during the glacials.

But the glacials helped prehistoric people by creating regions suitable for settlement. The cold climate of the glacials helped form grasslands where there had once been dense forests in Asia, Europe, and North America. The climate in many dry areas became wetter, changing deserts into grasslands. The grasslands became the home of large herds of antelope, bison (buffalo), wild horses, and other animals people could kill for food. After people learned to sew and to make warm clothes, they could live on grasslands almost next to the ice.

The glacials also created land for settlement in another way. Every time the ice sheets grew, they turned large amounts of ocean water into ice. As a result, the level of the sea fell. This lowering of the sea level uncovered new land for settlement. It also created land bridges that connected regions ordinarily separated by water. One of these land bridges linked Siberia with Alaska. Others connected the European mainland with Great Britain, and the Malay Peninsula with the Indo-

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### Early Human Settlement

The map below shows when human beings first lived in various regions of the world. The earliest known humans lived in Africa. From there, they spread through Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Early people reached America by crossing a dry land bridge that extended between Siberia and Alaska.

Area inhabited by 1,000,000 B.C.	Area inhabited by 35,000 B.C.	Area inhabited by 3000 B.C.
Area inhabited by 100,000 B.C.	Area inhabited by 8000 B.C.	Area uninhabited before 3000 B.C.

